DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 211 719 CE 030 983

AUTHOR Peterson, Michael; And Others
TITLE Issues and Recommendations Concerning Vocational Assessment of Special Needs Students.
PUB DATE Dec 81
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Vocational Association (Atlanta, GA, December 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Career Choice; Certification; Curriculum Development; *Disabilities; *Disadvantaged; Individualized Education Programs; Individual Needs; Informal Assessment; Needs Assessment; *Postsecondary Education; Program Development; *Secondary Education; Statewide Planning; Student Evaluation; Student Placement; Vocational Aptitude; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *Vocational Assessment; *Vocational Evaluation

ABSTRACT

Comprehensive vocational assessment needs to become an integral part of vocational programming in secondary and postsecondary schools, since it is crucial in developing appropriate individualized education plans for students with special needs. A prime focus for vocational assessment should be entrance into vocational education courses. It should be based on needs of each particular student (individualized) and on entrance criteria. Major assessment techniques available for use include medical, psychological, educational, and social assessments; interviews; informal teacher assessments; standardized vocational aptitude and interest tests; vocational counseling; dexterity and coordination tests; work samples; career exploration; systematic behavior observation; and tryouts. The target population should be special needs students who should be assessed one year prior to placement in vocational education. Informal assessment to help guide students into prevocational activities can also be used to determine need for programs and curricula. State required vocational assessment should be administered so input comes from informal teacher assessments and formal, comprehensive vocational evaluation. It is best implemented through a team effort headed by a vocational evaluation specialist who has been state-certified. Such specialists require graduate training while they and team members also require continuing inservice. (YLB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED211719

ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING VOCATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS

by

Michael Peterson, Bob Madden, and
Linda Ley-Siemer

American Vocational Association Convention
Atlanta, Georgia, 1981

Vocational Assessment Committee Co-Chairpersons
National Association of Vocational Education
Special Needs Personnel
(NAVESNP)

CE030983

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Michael Peterson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

VOCATIONAL ASSESSMENT/EVALUATION IN SCHOOLS

Introduction

As special educators and vocational educators have attempted to respond to the career development needs of persons with special needs - particularly the handicapped and disadvantaged - the need to comprehensively assess the vocational and life skills of these students has been increasingly recognized. Good assessment information is needed to develop vocationally relevant Individualized Education Plans (I.E.P.'s). Some schools consequently, have begun to develop programs of vocational evaluation. While vocational evaluation has been part of the rehabilitation system for several years, it is a relatively new service in schools. While a good deal of literature is available which describes the approach to vocational evaluation in rehabilitation, an approach to this service as it exists in schools has only minimally been articulated.

The NAVESNP Committee on Vocational Assessment, working with the Vocational Evaluation and Work Adjustment Association (VEWAA) and the Division for Career Development, has developed a working paper concerning this valuable service in an effort to articulate a view of vocational evaluation in schools. It is hoped that this paper may be helpful in guiding programs and policy development efforts in states and in local school districts.

To aid the committee in its work, information has been collected from several sources: (1) literature has been reviewed by the committee chairpersons: (2) a survey was developed to obtain feedback from NAVESNP members concerning vocational evaluation/assessment (89 questionnaires were returned); (3) a survey has been mailed to vocational-special needs supervisors in all 50 state departments of education requesting information concerning the status of vocational assessment in each state (35 were returned); (4) the input of approximately 20 committee members has been obtained.

Three subcommittees drafted initial portions of the position paper. A subcommittee, headed by Pam Hill, dealt with purposes, methods, and processes; a subcommittee headed by Linda Sey-Siemer dealt with certification and training. A committee headed by Bob Madden dealt with administrative concerns based on analysis of the survey input and comments by the total committee, the chairperson drafted a single revised paper. This was reviewed by the committee and revised. Subsequently, a summary of the paper was presented in Newsnotes and again revised based on reaction by NAVESNP members.

Key Issues

According to the NAVESNP survey the following are key issues related to vocational assessment:

1. Certification, training and experience of vocational evaluation specialists in schools.
2. Availability of trained vocational evaluation specialists.
3. Availability of vocational evaluation for all students, in addition to those with special needs.
4. Funding for vocational assessment/evaluation.
5. Insuring interpretation and use of vocational evaluation results.

Definitions

The terminology used to discuss vocational assessment and vocational evaluation of individuals is rather confusing and can inhibit a clear understanding and communication. The term "vocational evaluation" has been confusing to vocational educators because it is not readily apparent that the term refers to evaluation of individuals and not programs. The term "vocational evaluation" is used more by persons involved in vocational rehabilitation while educators tend to speak of "vocational assessment".

Vocational assessment is usually considered to be a generic term that describes the determination of the importance, size or value of the strengths and limitations of an individual which facilitate or interfere with vocational outcomes and development of proposals for vocational service plans.

While definitions of the term "vocational assessment" are not specifically tied to particular methods, the term "vocational evaluation" emphasized the use of real or simulated work as the focus of assessment and is, therefore, associated with the use of particular methods--notably work samples, job tryouts, and situational assessment. A series of task forces for the Vocational and Work Adjustment Association (VEWAA) defined vocational evaluation as:

> A comprehensive process that systematically uses work, real or simulated, as the focal point for assessment and vocational exploration, the purpose of which is to assist individuals in vocational development. Vocational evaluation incorporates medical, psychological, social, vocational, educational, cultural, and economic data in the attainment of the goals of the evaluation process (274, p. 86).

Vocational evaluation is comprehensive, in-depth form of vocational assessment that has been developed to more effectively evaluate the vocational strengths and needs of persons with special needs (274). "Vocational evaluation" and "comprehensive vocational assessment" may be considered as interchangeable terms.

Need for comprehensive vocational assessment

Comprehensive vocational assessment is crucial in developing appropriate individualized education plans for students with special needs. As such, there is a great need for this service to become an integral part of vocational programming in secondary and post-secondary schools. While more minimal vocational assessment may be adequate with some students, comprehensive vocational assessment is vital for many special needs students.

Purpose of comprehensive vocational assessment

The goals of vocational assessment are to:

1. Help students change behaviors, improve their self-concept and enhance their personal career development;
2. Provide information for use in developing individual career and vocational education plans;

3. To provide recommendations concerning: (a) vocational training; (b) pre-vocational and independent life skills training; (c) job readiness and placement; (d) support services and related agency services; (e) student learning needs, teaching techniques, and curriculum modifications; and (f) academic course selection.

All vocational training plans for special needs students should be based on vocational assessment information. While NAVESNP and vocational educators are concerned about broad career development and training in independent living skills, a prime focus for vocational assessment should be entrance into vocational education courses.

Vocational evaluation should include an analysis of a broad range of student skills and abilities that affect functioning in training on the job, and in the community. These may include: vocational aptitudes and abilities; vocational interests; work behaviors, attitudes, and habits; specific job skills; career awareness; learning potential and style; functional education skills; emotional status and social skills; physical abilities; intellectual abilities; and job-seeking skills.

Individualized vocational assessment

Vocational assessment should be individualized based on the needs of each particular student. Specific vocational assessment questions should be identified and methods used that will answer the questions while taking into account specific characteristics of the student.

Entrance criteria

Vocational assessment should be based on a clear understanding of the requirements of the environment for which the person is being assessed. When considering entrance into vocational training, systematic information should be gathered concerning entrance requirements for vocational courses via training analysis. When considering assessment for job placement, job analyses should be used to help determine entry level skills for jobs. The Dictionary of Occupational Titles may provide helpful general information which should be supplemented by local job analyses and locally gathered job information.

Methods of vocational evaluation

A variety of methods are available for use in comprehensive vocational assessment that can yield vocationally relevant information concerning students. These methods may include: medical, psychological, educational,and social assessments; interviews; informal teacher assessment; standardized vocational aptitude and interest tests; work samples; behavioral assessment and observational assessments; career exploration; exploratory shop placement, job tryout and/or situational assessment; and vocational counseling.

Methods should be used on an individualized basis to answer specific assessment questions. However, experientially based methods that involve the student in work--real or simulated--are characteristics of vocational evaluation that distinguish it from less intensive forms of vocational assessment. In general, such methods are vital to assure maximum student growth and valid assessment results. A summary of major assessment techniques follows:

Medical examinations should be used to gather information about specific physical abilities and to determine potential problems in various employment and life skill areas.

Cumulative records including reports of psychological, educational, and social assessments may provide valuable vocationally relevant information.

Interviews of students and parents are useful in determining student motivation, interest, personal plans, etc. Interviews and counseling should be used throughout assessment.

Informal teacher assessment can provide valuable information. Information systematically collected from special educators and vocational educators regarding learning styles, successes, problems, vocational interests, and living/social skills is an important part of vocational assessment and prevents duplication and inefficient formal vocational assessment for individuals.

Various paper-and-pencil tests can provide helpful information. Some types that are useful include vocational interest tests, aptitude and achievement tests, and personality tests. The results of such tests should be used with caution, however, since the actual skills of students with special needs may not be demonstrated by them.

Vocational counseling should be used throughout the process of assessment in combination with in-depth interviews. Counseling and feedback should be provided throughout the assessment process so that students can form better decisions about their own lives.

Hands-on methods of assessment have been shown to be useful with special needs persons. Dexterity and coordination tests may be useful in determining the physical abilities of students. Work samples are especially useful in simultaneously facilitating student vocational exploration and assessment of student abilities. Especially recommended are locally developed work samples that are based on local jobs and/or local vocational training programs. Commercially produced work samples (such as SIGNER, VALPAR, JEVS, etc.) may also be useful; however, their selection and use should be preceeded by a careful analysis of the types of assessment information needed and characteristics of the population served.

Vocational assessment should also involve components of career exploration via career information materials and/or actual work experiences -- work samples, job try-outs, etc. This allows the student to understand more about the world of work and his/her ability to fit into that world.

Systematic behavior observation in a controlled work setting can provide valuable information concerning a student's work habits, responses to supervision, peer relationships, and so forth. This assessment approach has been primarily associated with rehabilitation facilities. However, schools may arrange with such faciltities for implementation of this type of assessment.

Tryouts on actual jobs or in vocational education classes may constitute culminating activities in a comprehensive process of vocational assessment. Tryouts should be based upon previously gathered information and should be used to confirm previous indications of the appropriateness of job placement or entrance into vocational training.

Target population

Comprehensive vocational assessment is considered to be an invaluable tool for use in career planning for all students. However, students with special needs -- especially handicapped or disadvantaged -- should have priority in receiving comprehensive vocational assessment/evaluation services.

Comprehensive vocational assessment should occur, whenever possible, approximately one year prior to placement in vocational education. This will usually occur around the ninth or tenth grade. However, informal and less intensive vocational assessment is extremely helpful in guiding the student into pre-vocational types of activities and should begin as early as age 12 or 13. Re-evaluation may often be scheduled to update recommendations since students may improve skills. For instance, a comprehensive assessment may be done prior to recommending training for a student; another evaluation might be implemented following 2-3 years of training to determine job placement or other appropriate recommendations.

Use of comprehensive vocational assessment information

Vocational evaluation is not an end in itself but is used as an information base upon which appropriate educational decisions may be made. Collection of vocational assessment information must have an impact on programs and curricula as well as individual student programs. For instance, vocational evaluation information may show consistently that training in transportation skills and modified training in food service is needed. Based on this information, programs should be developed to meet these needs. For individual students, vocational evaluation should be used to help prescribe specific learning activities in special, regular, and vocational education classrooms.

A vocational evaluation report should be developed following each comprehensive vocational assessment. This report should completely but concisely summarize answers to assessment questions, results of assessments, and provide recommendations for student educational plans.

Vocational evaluation results must be available to all professions working with the student/client within confidentiality guidelines. Policies should be developed so that vocational teachers and other appropriate personnel have access to evaluation results.

A staffing should be held in which vocational evaluation results are discussed and an individualized career and vocational education plan developed. Such a meeting should involve an interdisciplinary team--including the student, parents,

the vocational evaluation specialist, special education teacher, work/study coordinator, vocational teacher, and rehabilitation counselor as appropriate. When leaving the school system (through graduation, etc.) a special staffing should be held to plan the transition of the student to community based programs--rehabilitation, CETA, etc. Community agency personnel should be involved and previous vocational assessment information reviewed.

Relationship to career assessment

Special educators have needs to monitor the total development of student skills related to their ability to function in home, community, as well as work environments. The continuing assessment of independent living skills, pre-vocational skills, etc., are highly related to but separate from vocational assessment. Administratively, special educators have responsibility for career assessment while there is joint responsibility with vocational education (and perhaps other agencies) for vocational assessment. Career and vocational assessment should be developed locally, however, so that they function as an effective total assessment process for special needs students.

State administration

Policies should be developed in each state between special education, vocational education, rehabilitation, and CETA concerning vocational assessment of special needs persons. A cooperative joint plan should be developed. Vocational education departments at the state level should maintain primary responsibility for vocational assessment in schools, however, This will allow the service to be used with a broader population than those with special needs.

Policies for vocational assessment should include minimal standards for the service and outline requirements for hiring of vocational evaluators in schools. Such policies should be developed with input from trained vocational evaluation specialists in each state.

State department of education should also encourage personnel development related to training in vocational evaluation.

Administrative models

Vocational assessment/evaluation should be administered so that (1) a systematic process is used by which informal teacher assessments can be collected, and (2) more formal, comprehensive vocational evaluation is implemented by a designated program or individual. This will insure a wide range of input from many sources while assuring accountability and responsibility. A vocational evaluator or other staff person with training in vocational evaluation should coordinate the overall data gathering process and should implement actual vocational assessment.

The following administrative models are available:

(1) Assessment in the special education classroom in which the special education teacher performs informal and formal assessment in addition to other instructional duties.

(2) Assessment in occupational exploration classes. Many states have initiated classes designed to help students make career decisions. Vocational assessment and exploration could be combined in such a class.

(3) Integrated vocational assessment. Vocational assessment - both formal and informal - may be implemented by a vocational evaluator in existing school resources - special vocational education classrooms, etc.

(4) Vocational evaluation center. A central location where work samples, staff, and assessment materials can be housed and be used. Schools may develop their own centers or cooperatively fund centers with vocational rehabilitation, CETA, and other agencies.

(5) Contracted vocational assessment. Private contractors, rehabilitation centers, etc., may provide vocational evaluation on a contractual basis.

(6) Mobile vocational evaluation units. Mobile vans or trailers may be used and moved from place to place.

Cooperative utilization of resources is crucial in developing formal vocational evaluation centers. On a local, as well as state level, programs in special education, vocational education, CETA, and rehabilitation should develop policies where vocational evaluation resources may be used jointly. This is crucial in a time of dwindling financial resources.

Funding

Funding sources should include Vocational Education, CETA, Special Education, Adult Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, private agencies, and the industrial sector. Increased state/federal financial support of vocational evaluation of special needs students is justified. Innovative cooperative funding efforts for vocational assessment should be encouraged.

Vocational evaluation specialist

A person with specific training in vocational evaluation should be responsible for implementing and/or coordinating the comprehensive vocational assessment process. In rural areas, such an individual might work with several schools in helping to establish systematic collection and use of vocational assessment information.

Team effort

Vocational assessment in schools is best implemented as a team effort. Many individuals, from administrators to counselors to instructors, should be involved in the vocational evaluation process. The special education teacher, vocational instructor, and the vocational evaluator should work cooperatively in a team effort to facilitate an appropriate vocational evaluation. Paraprofessionals may be utilized. Their involvement, however, should be primarily for the administration of specific evaluation tools under the direction of the trained, professional vocational evaluation specialist.

Background training and certificaiton of vocational evaluation specialists

There are several professional areas currently that lend themselves to the field of vocational evaluation. Some of these professional areas include special education, vocational education, vocational guidance and counseling, rehabilitation, educational pyschology and social work. Persons with degrees in these areas could add certification in vocational evaluation by taking select courses in vocational evaluation.

There should be a core of required courses to be certified as a vocational evaluator. These requirements should be specified in state policy based upon input of professional vocational evaluators.

Certification

A separate certification of vocational evaluation specialists should be developed through the State Department of Education in each state. Such a certification may take the form of an extra endorsement to be applied to existing certifications, or may be identified as a totally separate certification. Certification requirements should include: (1) professional certification as a vocational evaluation specialist by the Commission on Certification of Work Adjustment and Vocational Evaluation Specialists (CCWAVES); (2) a graduate introductory course in special education and vocational education; and (3) graduate course work (6-12 hours) in vocational evaluation/assessment. Vocational evaluation/assessment courses should minimally include training in the following areas:

- vocational aptitude, interest, and career awareness tests
- career development counseling processes
- dexterity and coordination tests
- utilization of commercial work samples
- development of local work samples
- design of informal assessment techniques for team members
- situational assessment
- interpretation and report writing

Teacher certification should not be required as a pre-requisite to certification as a vocational evaluator in schools, though orientation and training concerning vocational education, special education, and work with handicapped adolescents should be required for certification as a vocational evaluation specialist.

Professional certification

The Commission on Certification of Work Adjustment and Vocational Evaluation Specialists (CCWAVES) was recently formed and is initiating a professional certification process. Vocational evaluators in schools should be certified by this Commission and state certification should be partially based on it. The Commission, however, should develop the certification process so that the needs and orientation of vocational evaluators in schools are adequately represented.

Training in vocational evaluation

Training is needed both for (1) vocational evaluation specialists and for (2) members of the vocational assessment team. Both graduate training and in-service is needed.

Universities must provide the primary training for vocational evaluation specialists. Such training should be developed cooperatively between university departments of rehabilitation, counseling, vocational education, and special education. Interdisciplinary degrees should be developed; additional course work should be available for persons currently having teacher certification who wish to function as vocational evaluation specialists. Courses should be available for counselors, special education teachers, etc., so that team members develop some awareness of vocational evaluation in their pre-service programs.

In-service should be offered on a continuing basis for both specialists and team members. In-service, initially, will be the most effective mode of training team members in local schools.